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SUBJECT: MEDIA REACTION REPORT - Lebanon - International Force -
France's Conditions U.S. Policy in the Middle East - Secretary Rice
in Command
PARIS - Friday, August 18, 2006

(A) SUBJECTS COVERED IN TODAY'S REPORT:

Lebanon - International Force - France's Conditions
U.S. Policy in the Middle East - Secretary Rice in Command

B) SUMMARY OF COVERAGE:

Reporting from Washington in Le Figaro, Guillemette Faure writes in
an article entitled "G.W. Bush Delegates the Middle East to
Condoleezza Rice" that "the Secretary of State, who is more
appreciated abroad than the President, implements his policy
faithfully." (See Part C)

France's "conditions and reluctance" regarding its participation in
the UNIFIL are today's lead international stories. For Le Figaro,
"France Sets Its Conditions" while for Liberation "France Is

Reluctant." The editorial in Le Figaro is entitled "France on the Front Lines" and characterizes France's mission as "highly dangerous" while Liberation's editorial entitled "Resistances" claims that "Chirac's sending 200 additional soldiers as scouts is akin to 'diplomatically flipping the bird' to Kofi Annan." (See Part C)

In an article entitled "Between Paris and Hezbollah, a Conflicting Past" Le Monde comments: "A well informed source has revealed that Paris has made contact with Iran, Hezbollah's tutor, as to its intentions regarding the safety of military personnel deployed in the buffer zone... France has every reason to be concerned for its troops considering that Lebanon has in the past crystallized the regional power struggle for influence..."

Le Parisien borrows a quotation from a military officer to title its article "We Have Much to Fear Here." The article attributes those fears to France's visible cooperation with the U.S. The officer adds: "Paris is trying to strike a balance between the Americans and the Arabs, but the Hezbollah Islamists are not fools; they know we are directly engaged beside the Americans in Afghanistan, for example.... Now that peace is returning, we are becoming priority targets here." For La Croix, France will be the "backbone" of the bolstered UNIFIL. Its article carries the optimistic words of General Alain Pellegrini. "The new UNIFIL will be very different from the old one. The old UNIFIL is dead. The new one will be stronger, with greater numbers and new rules of engagement." La Croix quotes Minister of Defense Alliot-Marie as calling the participation of Muslim countries in the international force a "very good thing."

In a separate article, La Croix reports details of Turkey's plans to contribute troops. The article says a Turkish contingent may aid "reconciliation with the United States three years after Turkey refused to participate in the war in Iraq and to let columns of American armor pass through its territory." Turkey may also prove to be a "bridge between East and West" in NATO, La Croix says.

On Lebanon's reconstruction and Hezbollah's role, FR2 television reports that "Hezbollah was quicker than the Lebanese government and promised the population money and housing." Many civilians interviewed thanked Hezbollah and said that they felt "safe" because they "trusted them". FR2 observed the perfect organization of the movement and said that Hezbollah "was establishing itself as a political and a social force in Lebanon."

Le Figaro carries two op-eds on the Middle East and on the war on terror. The latter, by George Soros is a French translation of a Syndicated column in which Soros says that the "'war against terrorism' is a nefarious and aberrant notion." The former, by the British-Lebanese writer Percy Kemp is entitled "In the Middle East, Ideas Can Be Killers." Kemp comments: "I would love to believe the Americans are in Iraq for its oil. But the fact is that they are in Iraq because of the 'idea' they have of the New Middle East... Similarly, Hezbollah is launching its missiles not to regain land from Israel, but because of the 'idea' it has of martyrdom..."

(C) SUPPORTING TEXT/BLOCK QUOTES:

Lebanon - International Force - France's Conditions

"France on the Front Line"

Pierre Rousselin in right-of-center Le Figaro (08/18): "If France is taking the lead of the international force it is because of France's relationship with Lebanon and because it is a way to return to the Middle East in a central role, after having been evicted by America's unilateralism... Playing this role implies that France has the right to speak its mind. But taking on this role has its price, as evidenced by the lack of other candidates for the mission... Twenty-three years after France left Lebanon, the risks are just as great, in view of Iran and Syria's intransigence. This must not lead France to shirk its responsibility. But France has a right to ask for the enlarged UNIFIL's mission to have a chance at being successful... 'This hot potato' must not be passed on solely to France: others must also participate. And to avoid having France look like the West's armed representative, Arab and Muslim nations must participate... The previous situation in Bosnia, with a resolution that did not mention the use of force, must be avoided. It is normal that France should demand guarantees before taking on

the command of the UNIFIL... For the good of the mission, it is normal for France to set its conditions."

"Resistance"

Gerard Dupuy in left-of-center Liberation (08/18): "President Chirac's offer to send an initial contingent of 200 soldiers... is akin to diplomatically flipping the bird to Kofi Annan... The situation could turn out to be a trap for France's soldiers. This is why Chirac has every right to demand that as little ambiguity as possible remain before sending his troops... Disarming Hezbollah remains the major problem, considering that Israel has been unable to do it and the Lebanese army is not even trying... But things could be moving: Mahmoud Abbas's call for an end to the strikes on Israel by 'armed groups from Gaza' is one indication. And if things are beginning to move, it is all the more reason not to act precipitously. UNIFIL soldiers can accompany peace, they cannot invent it."

"France Reluctant"

Isabelle Lasserre in right-of-center Le Figaro (08/18): "France's politicians are dragging their feet... France wants more guarantees on the nature of the mission... or it will revise the number of soldiers it is ready to send... France is concerned about the 'evasive' nature of resolution 1701... Without the proper means and veritable rules of engagement, French soldiers could find themselves in the crossfire between the Israelis and Hezbollah's militia."

U.S. Policy in the Middle East - Secretary Rice in Command

"Bush Delegates Middle East to Condoleezza Rice"

Guillemette Faure in right-of-center Le Figaro (08/18): "Since last July, Condoleezza Rice has taken over America's Middle East policy. She elicits less hostility abroad than the President. She is also more effective in defending America's policy at home. According to a CNN poll, 62 % of respondents regard Secretary Rice as the administration's most popular figure... She has been able to explain at home that the new Middle East will be preferable to the semblance of peace that existed previously... Although Rice supported the 'preemptive' attack on Iraq, public opinion does not hold it against her. She is well liked at the State Department, where her accessibility and listening qualities are heralded. Contrary to Madeleine Albright, who was appreciated abroad but held in contempt by her colleagues. Most importantly, she has the support of the President, unlike her predecessor, Colin Powell... But her initial interventions in the Lebanese crisis were not convincing. Her efforts were limited to a paradoxical diplomatic shuttle during which she tried to explain that the U.S. wanted peace but not right away... Another paradox lies in the team that accompanies her in the negotiations. Elliott Abrams and David Welch are very dissimilar... Abrams... is of the school that believes the U.S. can make democratic inroads in the Middle East and that a confrontation with Iran is inevitable. Welch on the other hand is more favorable to stability than democratic revolution... The question now is whether Secretary Rice will be able to continue as mediator of opposing

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views within the Administration, while having to endorse front line choices. Already she is facing criticism as her effectiveness begins to be questioned." HOFMANN